

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY: S/S-O:JHOGANSON

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TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 058963

EXDIS TOSEC-625

FOLLOWING REPEAT ADDIS ABABA 3091 ACTION SECSTATE INFO

ASMARA DTD 16 MAR 5

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S E C R E T ADDIS ABABA 3091

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, ET, US

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN AMMO RESUPPLY: PRESS GUIDANCE

REF: STATE 058886 AND 058897

1. WE RELIZE THE ENORMOUS DIFFICULTIES IN DEVISING ANY PRESS GUIDANCE WHATSOEVER ON THIS SUBJECT WHICH WILL NOT BE SEVERELY CRITICIZED FROM DIFFERENCE STANDPOINTS BY ALL PARTIES SERIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH THE ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS WE HAVE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS

2. THE PROPOSED GUIDANCE WOULD SAY IN RESPONSE TO THE FIRST AND LAST QUESTIONS THAT THE EPMG IS READY TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH THE ELF/PLF AND HAS AGREED TO SEND A DELEGATION TO KHARTOUM. THESE

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REMARKS GO FAR BEYOND THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO DATE OF THE EPMG.

ALTHOUGH IT HAS SAID IN GENERAL TERMS THAT IT FAVORS A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND IS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WITH APPROPRIATE ERITREANS, IT HAS NOT PUBLICLY ENDORSED NIMEIRI'S MEDIATION EFFORT OR ANNOUNCED THAT A DELEGATION HAS GONE TO KHARTOUM. THE PMAC IS KNOWN TO FEEL THAT IT COULD MORE EASILY AND SOONER HAVE BEGUN NEGOTIATIONS IN KHARTOUM IF NIMEIRI'S MEDIATION OFFER HAD NOT BEEN PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED. OUR ONLY INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEPARTURE OF THE DELEGATION TO KHARTOUM HAS COME FROM THE SUDANESE. THE PROPOSED PRESS GUIDANCE IS THEREFORE LIKELY TO AROUSE STRONG ADVERSE REACTIONS IN THE PMAC AND WE ANTICIPATE BITTER PROTESTS THAT WE HAVE BROADCAST THE EXISTENCE OF SECRET NEGOTIATIONS TO THE WORLD AT LARGE. THE EPMG MAY WELL SUSPECT THAT THE PRESS STATEMENT REFLECTS INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE SUDANESE, IN WHICH CASE THEIR SUSPICIONS ABOUT NIMEIRI'S SUITABILITY AS A MEDIATOR WILL FURTHER INCREASE. FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE EPMG IT WOULD THEREFORE BE FAR BETTER IF THE PRESS STATEMENT ON THIS POINT SAID SOMETHING LIKE THE FOLLOWING: " IN THIS RESPECT WE HAVE NOTED SOME ENCOURAGING INDICATIONS OF PROGRESS TOWARDS MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITIES AND THE ELF/PLF".

3. WE QUESTION THE ADVISABILITY OF CITING THE SEVEN MILLION DOLLAR FIGURE. THE EPMG WILL RESENT PUBLICATION OF THIS FIGURE BECAUSE IT WILL REVEAL TO ALL THE WORLD THAT THE U.S. RESPONSE HAS BEEN FAR BELOW THE LEVEL OF ITS REQUEST. ITS RESENTMENT WILL BE BASED PRIMARILY ON FEAR THAT THIS REVELATION WILL ENCOURAGE THE ELF/PLF AND THE STATES BACKING THEM BY REVEALING THAT THE EPMG ENJOYS ONLY HALF-HEARTED SUPPORT FROM THE USG IN RELATION TO THE ERITREAN PROBLEM. (WE BELIEVE THE ELF/PLF WILL IN FACT CONSIDER THAT SEVEN MILLION DOLLAR CONSTITUTES AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE WHICH INDICATES THAT THE USG SOLIDLY SUPPORTS THE EPMG.) WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE FOR THE PRESS GUIDANCE MERELY TO INDICATE THAT THE USG HAS AGREED TO PROVIDE SOME OF THE AMMUNITION REQUESTED BY THE EPMG. WE REALIZE THAT THE ACTUAL AMOUNT MIGHT SOON NEVERTHELESS APPEAR IN THE PRESS BUT, UNLESS CONFIRMED BY THE USG, THIS INFORMATION WOULD BE LESS EMBARRASSING FOR THE EPMG.

4. WE QUESTION THE WISDOM OF STRESSING TO ELF/PLF OFFICIALS THE "MINIMAL" NATURE OF THE U.S. RESPONSE. SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS WORTH
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OF AMMUNITION WILL INEVITABLY LOOK LARGE TO THE ELF, PARTICULARLY SINCE FURTHER INSTALLMENTS COULD FOLLOW. THE DESIGNATION AS "MINIMAL" MAY THEREFORE BE SEEN NOT ONLY AS ADDING INSULT TO INJURY BUT AS SUGGESTING THAT MUCH LARGER AMOUNTS MAY SUBSEQUENTLY BE APPROVED. WE SUGGEST AVOIDING THE EMPHASIS ON MINIMAL AND PLACING ALL OUR EMPHASIS IN REPRESENTATIONS TO THE ELF/PLF ON THE PRESSURES WE ARE BRINGING TO BEAR ON THE EPMG TO NEGOTIATE.

5. WE BELIEVE THE PRESS STATEMENT WOULD BE BETTER ACCEPTED IN MOST QUARTERS, INCLUDING THE EPMG, IF IT SPOKE OF OUR OWN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF AFRICAN STATES, INCLUJCG ETHIOPIA. WE BELIEVE THIS ASPECT DESERVES EMPHASIS ALONG WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPONSE TO A COUNTRY TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON US FOR ARMS AND AMMUNITION.

6. WE BELIEVE ONE OF THE STRONGEST ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE DECISION WHICH HAS BEEN TAKEN IS THAT A RESUPPLY OF AMMUNITION TO THE EPMG, AT A TIME WHEN THE INSURGENTS ARE RECEIVING ARMS FROM ABROAD, IS A BALANCING ACTION WHICH INCREASES THE PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE EPMG AND THE ELF/PLF. WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE THIS POINT MENTIONED IN THE PRESS GUIDANCE ALTHOUGH WE REALIZE THAT IT CANNOT BE OVER-EMPHASIZED LEST THE IMPRESSION BE GIVEN THAT THE EPMG MIGHT HAVE TO ABANDON ERITREA IF IT DIDN'T RECEIVE AMMUNITION FROM THE USG.

7. WE MUST RELECTANTLY RECOMMEND THE DELETION OF THE SENTENCE: "THE EPMG CHARGED A NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL WITH COMMITTING EXCESSES AND SEVERELY PUNISHED THEM." IF THE PRESS ASKS FOR PROOF OF THIS STATEMENT, WE MAY HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN SUBSTANTIATING IT. WE WOULD PREFER TO SEE WHAT WE CAN FIND OUT ON THIS SUBJECT FROM THE EPMG AND THEN USE THE POINT AT SOME SUBSEQUENT PRESS BRIEFING IF WE ARE CONVINCED IT IS VALID.

8. WITH REGARD TO THE TIMING OF OUR NOTIFICATION TO GOVERNMENTS ON THIS PRESS GUIDANCE, WE BELIEVE THAT THE CLOSER OUR APPROACH TO THE EPMG IS TO THE TIME OF THE WASHINGTON ANNOUNCEMENT, THE GREATER WILL BE THE IRRITATION HERE. WE WOULD THEREFORE HOPE THE CHARGE' COULD BE AUTHORIZED TO APPROACH ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER GETACHEW KEBRET THIS EVENING, MARCH 16, IF HE CAN BE REACHED. IT CERTAINLY SEEMS APPROPRIATE FOR THE EPMG TO BE THE FIRST
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GOVERNMENT NOTIFIED. WYMAN UNQTE INGERSOLL

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